PROPOSED PROVIDENT INSTITUTION FOR BUILDING OPERATIVES.

A VERY influential meeting of architects, contractors, and others, to consider Professor Cockerell's suggested Institution, was held at the Guildhall, London, on Tuesday, the 11th, when the scheme, it will be seen, was fairly launched.

By the unanimous vote of the meeting

Mr. Cockerell was called to the chair, and opened the proceedings at considerable length in an admirable address, expounding the project already familiar to our readers, and disclaiming any personal merit as the originator of the scheme. He dwelt particularly on the importance he attached to the support of the architects and engineers, in addition to that of the master builders, and concluded by soliciting suggestions from the gentlemen present.

As Mr. Cockerell's views are already fully before our readers, it is unnecessary here to reiterate them.

Mr. Tite said that many thanks were due to Mr. Cockerell for his exertions, but whilst he (Mr. Tite) approved of his suggestions in the main, he thought the present meeting was not sufficiently informed upon the subject to take any definite proceedings. A similar plan to that now proposed was actually in existence at the Excise-office, all the servants in which establishment contributed to a life assurance and benevolent fund. The system was also about to be introduced on an extensive scale amongst the men employed by the great railway companies. There would be some difficulty in dealing with building operatives, their character being generally essentially democratic, and it was well known that they liked to govern themselves. It was also necessary to guard carefully against anything of an eleemosynary character in the proposed scheme. Of the general advantages of the plan there could be no doubt; but he would rather, in the first instance, solicit the opinions of his friends Mr. T. and Mr. W. Cubitt, Mr. Baker, and others around him, as to the practicability of adopting a general system of the kind. In order that the project should go on, he begged leave to move that a committee should be appointed to inquire carefully into the whole subject, and collect the statistical and other information so much required.

Mr. Hardwick briefly expressed his cordial and entire approval of the measure, and his concurrence in Mr. Tite's suggestion.

Mr. Higgins seconded the motion, as Mr. Hardwick had omitted to do so.

Mr. T. Cubitt said it appeared to him the subject was an exceedingly difficult one. He feared the number of masters, architects, and engineers, would bear a very small proportion to the immense body to be benefited by the plan. It was important to ascertain what sums the men could spare, and whether these sums would realize an adequate provision for old age. That plan could not come into full operation for many years, and it should be considered how far the gentlemen present could bind their successors to carry it out, if adopted. He did not think so much sympathy and aid would be extended by the higher ranks of society to builders' workmen as to domestic servants, to whom allusion had been made; and there were other points on which information, statistics, and calculations, were greatly needed. He concurred in the appointment of a committee of inquiry, and in the gratitude expressed, and which every gentleman must feel, to the chairman, for his proposal, and sincerely hoped it would be carried out.

Mr. Sheriff Lawrence regarded the scheme as one of such magnitude that no Government would venture to undertake it—it was, in fact, national—embracing, as it did, so many thousands of individuals. The cases of the excise and railway officials and the domestic servants would not apply to artisans of all ages and conditions, who must be dealt with under very different circumstances. A general society would be far more difficult to form than one limited to a private building concern. Much depended on the statistics of life amongst artisans, on which point the existing tables were very defective. He thought the workmen ought to be the prime movers in such a scheme, but feared the majority of them were not prepared for that sacrifice of present enjoyment to remote advantages, which was the foundation of its success. They should, at all events, be enabled at any time to withdraw their savings; whilst, on the other hand, he feared, from the vicissitudes of trade, they would too often avail themselves of that privilege. The cost of management should certainly be paid for them, but without interference with their love of self-government, which he regarded as a laudable feeling.

Mr. Baker trusted the meeting would not be deterred by the difficulties referred to. From his experience of workmen, he differed with the worthy sheriff, and felt assured that they only required to be put in the right way, and that there were thousands of them quite prepared to avail themselves of this project. The power of withdrawing their deposits would convince the men the scheme was intended solely for their benefit, and remove all suspicion from their minds. The immense number of workmen in London ought to be no obstacle, for but a limited number could be expected to avail themselves of the plan; and if only one-third of them could be benefited their object would be amply answered. He hoped and believed, for the honour of the profession, that Mr. T. Cubitt's anxiety as to the support of their successors, was unfounded. Useful societies never lacked support: if well established, this society must succeed.

Mr. Ansell, actuary, being appealed to, said he was well acquainted with the excise and railway schemes which had been alluded to, but did not think either very analogous to that now proposed. The number of persons said to be connected with building and engineering in London, 300,000, must be rather an exaggerated estimate, including their families, and others dependent on them. He suggested the desirability of adding to the Committee some of the operatives themselves, well knowing that unless the recipients of the advantages of friendly societies had a share in their management, these societies always worked badly. It was advisable not to encumber the plan with too many apparent advantages. He approved of a provision for old age and sickness, and a payment on the workman's death, but not the provisions for widows and orphans, on which point the statistics were far from perfect. He should feel great pleasure in giving the project every aid and information in his power.

Mr. Nelson concurred with Mr. Ansell. He had no misgivings whatever of the practicability of the scheme, and under Mr. Ansell's advice, it would be impossible to fall into any serious mistake. The existing Friendly Societies were badly managed, but a happier period was dawning on the country, and it was from these societies, that the elevation of the working classes was to be looked for.

Mr. Piper thought, when his friend Sheriff Lawrence had spoken, he was giving a history of the infirmities of human nature, instead of describing the habits and dispositions of the working classes, for he (Mr. Piper) believed the latter, as a body, to be as provident, as thoughtful, and as intelligent, as any class of the community. He had always found them ready to receive and adopt any suggestions sincerely made for their benefit. Some time ago he had ascertained that one-tenth of the whole number of claimants upon the Orphan Asylums of the metropolis, were connected with the building trade in its various branches. The only doubt that could now be suggested was, whether the public mind was prepared for the ample scheme of Mr. Cockerell. He believed the intended meeting of the Builders' Foremen, was a favourable indication, and that a large number of workmen were willing to adopt it. Much information was necessary as to details, for the meeting ought to be prepared to submit some definite statements to the operatives, and aid them in every possible way. He fully approved of Mr. Tite's proposition.

Mr. Lee expressed his warm approbation of the scheme, and his conviction that the difficulties attending it might and ought to be overcome.

The motion was then put and carried as follows: "That a committee be appointed to inquire carefully into the subject of the Provident and Benevolent Society, suggested and proposed by Mr. Cockerell, in connection with the building branches; and to collect facts and statistics relating thereto; and that such committee do report to a further meeting of the parties present, and such other friends as may take an interest in the matter."

Mr. Cockerell, Mr. Hardwick, Mr. Tite, Mr. Roberts, Mr. Bunning, and Mr. Angell (architects); Mr. Ald. Lawrence, Mr. T. Cubitt, Mr. W. Cubitt, Mr. Lee, Mr. Piper, and Mr. Baker (builders), were then constituted a committee in accordance with the above resolution, with power to add some engineers to their number,* and to call in one or two intelligent workmen to aid their deliberations.

Mr. Wales was appointed honorary secretary; and a vote of thanks to the chairman having been carried unanimously, the meeting separated.

THE OPENING OF MARYLEBONE BATHS AND WASHHOUSES took place on Monday last. They stand on the site of the late tea-gardens of the Yorkshire Stingo. Mr. Christopher Eales is the architect. The cost of the whole will be very nearly 20,000*l*. The buildings are of red brick, and contain 107 baths, besides shower and vapour baths and two swimming baths. The washing department is fitted up for 84 persons washing. We shall make a dip into these baths before long.

WHAT IS A FOREMAN?—In the Court of Exchequer, on Tuesday, a builder's scaffolder described a foreman as "a man who walks about and does nothing, and orders everybody else to work."

* Mr. Rennie and Mr. Field were named as favourable to the project.

MEETING OF BUILDERS' FOREMEN ON PROPOSED BUILDING ARTIFICERS' PROVIDENT SOCIETY.

THE Institution of Builders' Foremen held a meeting on Wednesday evening last, to consider "the advantages to be derived from the scheme set forth in THE BUILDER of 15th September last, by Professor Cockerell;" Mr. Kay, the president, in the chair.

After a few remarks on the kindly feeling of the proposer, and his earnest desire to promote union and good fellowship among all classes of the building trades, the president pointed to the more immediate object in view, namely, to make his scheme for the well-being of all, familiar to the members and their friends, to court inquiry into its merits, and to elicit suggestions for its practical realization, or its adaptation to their particular benefit, as well as to that of others.

It was then moved by Mr. Hawking, seconded by Mr. Allard (the secretary), and carried unanimously,—"That, as the happiness of a nation must necessarily depend on the prosperity of its people, it becomes a primary duty, on all whose dependencies rest on industry, to use their most strenuous exertion to secure a provision for old age and infirmities before the tide of life begins to ebb; and that any scheme proposed for such a purpose is entitled to the fullest and most deliberate consideration of those for whose benefit it is professedly intended."

The mover said that the statistical details which had been given were, he conceived, very satisfactory; and if domestic servants, he observed, were countenanced and supported in their provident endeavours, as a society of theirs has been, by Prince Albert and others, why should not the building artisans, be asked, meet with equal favour and countenance? Their claims were equally great, and equally appealed to them from those hearths and homes which building artificers provided for them. If the members, one and all, of the building trades themselves, at all events, could only be brought to see the necessity of uniting more together, it would be greatly to the advantage of all, and he would ask them to remember the example set them at Guildhall yesterday by the leading architects and builders.

Mr. Taylor gave his cordial adhesion to the resolution as not only unobjectionable, but good—religiously good.

The second resolution, moved by Mr. Watmough and seconded by Mr. Tuckwell, was as follows:—"That this meeting having considered the plan submitted to the building trades by Professor Charles Robert Cockerell, and partially developed in THE BUILDER of September 15, 1849, are of opinion that it contains much which is calculated, as a groundwork (subjected to modification and addition), to effect so desirable an object, for the benefit of a very great number of all classes employed in the building trades:" carried unanimously.

A resolution was then moved by Mr. Locke, expressing the opinion of the meeting that the proposed institution was calculated to effect much good, and pledging themselves to assist in making its importance felt. He urged them to receive the suggestion in good part and in the spirit with which it was offered, and great social benefit to the building trades could not but result from it. Let them also never forget that God helps them who help themselves.

In seconding the resolution, Mr. Taylor said,—Union is strength—can any one deny that good saying? A house divided against itself cannot stand. He had been both workman and employer, and he knew that unless both parties go on pleasantly, and hand in hand, neither will go on well. Every man would find it for his own interest to promote the welfare of those above him as well as below him.

Mr. Allard, in speaking to the resolution, said that he had had the honour of an interview with Mr. Cockerell, and was deeply impressed with the kind feeling manifested by him, and his sense of the importance of such a feeling and of friendly union between employer and employed. He hoped his fellow foremen would appreciate the motives of those gentlemen who had now come forward with the friendly hand of union presented to them. There was great need of it in the present time, as the bitter experience of many of them could attest. It was a duty to themselves, their families, and their children, to be provident, even apart from all other considerations.

The resolution was then carried unanimously, as was the next, namely, "That a deputation of three members be appointed to wait on Mr. Cockerell to express to that gentleman the general feeling of this meeting to co-operate in carrying out his views."

It was then resolved, "That the thanks of this meeting are due and are hereby given to Professor Cockerell, for the trouble and anxiety he has taken in the matter. And also for the very courteous and friendly manner in which he has on all occasions received and communicated with this institution."

Further,—"That the thanks of this meeting are due and are hereby given to Mr. George Godwin for his exertions in his public capacity to forward the same object."

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